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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 522nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 22 January 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Second periodic report of Sweden (CRC/C/65/Add.3; HRI/CORE/1/Add.4; CRC/C/Q/SWE/2; written replies of the Government of Sweden to the questions raised in the list of issues) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Sweden took places at the Committee table.

2. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that the Government of Sweden's decision to introduce human rights considerations into multilateral and bilateral assistance agreements was an important step that she hoped other Governments would follow. It would be useful to know if any evaluation of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman had been carried out in Sweden, and whether the new supervisory mechanism of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs was a monitoring or coordinating mechanism, or both. Had that mechanism evaluated the impact of government programmes on children?

3. Few countries were able to provide precise figures on the portion of their budgets allocated for children, an important issue under article 4 of the Convention. What was the status of the Swedish children's budget, announced in 1995? It would be useful to know whether the Government of Sweden examined the impact of macroeconomic policies on children.

4. Since her question on the subject at the previous meeting had not been answered, she once again asked whether Sweden had taken steps to translate the Convention into minority languages, or had produced a simplified version for specialized groups.

5. More information would be welcome regarding refugee children who were in hiding in Sweden: what measures, if any, had been taken to protect their rights under the Convention? It would also be useful to know whether unaccompanied refugee children and the children of refugee families were still being denied placement in day-nurseries.

6. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Sweden to reply to those questions as well as to any questions that remained unanswered from the previous meeting.

7. Mr. SVENSSON (Sweden) said that Government departments had been instructed to analyse all their decisions in the light of the best interests of the child. The budget estimates for 1999 amounted to SKr 700 billion; about 20 per cent, or SKr 130 billion, had been allocated for various kinds of support for children.

8. The question whether all children, including refugee and unaccompanied refugee children, should be provided with day care had been much debated in his country. The right of all children to equal treatment was, of course, protected by the Convention; the problem was an economic one. The Prime Minister had recently announced to Parliament that all children would be provided with day-care services as soon as possible.

9. His Government had provided training in Convention rights to teachers and educational staff in the public sector; the private sector would be the next area tackled. In the commercial domain, some private companies had taken their own initiatives; a group of businesses had agreed not to sell goods and clothing produced by child labour. Travel agencies throughout the Nordic countries had agreed to provide information on the sexual exploitation of children to all persons travelling to countries where sexual tourism was practised, and educational video cassettes were being shown on commercial aircraft.

10. His Government held many meetings with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both formal and informal, and took their views into account in the drafting of all legislation. In addition, associations of NGOs held meetings to which representatives of the Government were invited. The relationship between the Government and NGOs resembled a marriage: it was close, conflictual, and variable.

11. Ms. JAHN (Sweden) said that the State Inheritance Fund had allocated considerable sums of money to NGOs to enable them to disseminate information on the principles of the Convention. As part of its celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention, Sweden was planning new public-information measures, including activities in which children, including refugee and disabled children, would participate.

12. In reply to a question about traditional practices, she had already explained her Government's attitude towards the practice of female genital mutilation. The Government was also assessing male circumcision, with a view to ensuring that the relevant regulations were compatible with the Convention.

13. The question of inculcating an understanding of article 12 was a difficult one, and required educating parents in the sense of its provisions. There was no mechanism explicitly devised to implement the terms of that article, but the Swedish social welfare system provided counselling to families in need of assistance. The Code of Parenthood and Guardianship accorded to parents the right and responsibility of making decisions about their children's welfare, including medical ones. As a child matured, however, he was permitted an increasing say in matters that affected him.

14. When a very young child sought counselling, medical or otherwise, it was the duty of the counsellor to inform the parents. Older children were, however, protected by the Secrecy Act, and their needs and interests were considered to override the parent's right to information. Such decisions were, of course, also made at the discretion of the counsellor.

15. Most of the legislation regulating administrative and judicial decisions affecting children incorporated provisions that reflected the terms of article 12. Furthermore, Government funds were allocated on an ongoing basis to programmes for the training of professionals. Although the Children's Ombudsman did not receive complaints directly from children, an NGO had set up a telephone hotline, which children could use when they needed assistance, and which offered personal guidance as well as assistance in directing their complaints toward the appropriate institution. That hotline was well known to children throughout Sweden.

16. Ms. SAARINEN (Sweden) said that the Radio and Television Act had been amended to strengthen its provisions on violence, and broadcasts containing violence were henceforth required to carry warnings. Coded and uncoded broadcasts were also regulated. In addition, the Council on Fictionalized Violence had the task of coordinating national efforts to combat harmful fictionalized violence. A conference was to be held at Stockholm in February 1999 to discuss ways of inculcating positive attitudes toward sexuality in young people. In addition, her Government intended to request the National Institute of Public Health to survey young people's attitudes toward sex and pornography.

17. Lastly, the Children's Ombudsman had, on his own initiative, undertaken a public opinion survey and had learned that most adults and children were familiar with the principles of the Convention; if the Committee so desired, it could be supplied with a detailed account of the survey's findings.

18. Ms. BACKLUND (Sweden) said that the minimum age for marriage was 18, and special permission had to be requested of the local council to marry under that age. Although the relevant legislation applied to both Swedes and foreigners, it also permitted a foreigner to marry under the law of his country of origin if that law differed from the Swedish one. Furthermore, a Swedish citizen who had resided for not less than two years in a foreign country could marry in accordance with the laws of that country. As far as she was aware, no local council had ever given permission to marry to a child under the age of 15. Sweden was currently undertaking a broad overview of international family law, which included the matter of the marriage age.

19. Most practising lawyers in Sweden were members of the Swedish Bar Association, and could decide for themselves whether or not to undertake further training. They could, if they so wished, participate in courses offered by the office of the prosecutor.

20. Ms. SANDQVIST (Sweden) said that, in principle, any child in Sweden, including an asylum-seeker, enjoyed the right to health care and social assistance, even after his application to remain in that country had been rejected, provided he maintained contact with the authorities. The Government believed that to accord all the entitlements under the Convention both to children who absconded and to those who kept in contact with the authorities would send an unfortunate signal. Furthermore, it was unreasonable to give one authority the task of expediting an expulsion order and another the task of fulfilling all entitlements under the Convention.

21. The Government believed that the solution lay in discouraging families from going into hiding. It had accordingly instructed the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Immigration Board to attempt to estimate the number of children who were living in hiding and to analyse why families went into hiding and the impact of such conditions on the physical and psychological health of children. That report would be submitted in March 1999.

22. Ms. JAHN said that the Swedish Constitution protected the civil rights and freedoms of both Swedish citizens and foreigners. She regretted that the report had not provided comprehensive information on that point.

23. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions on the subjects of family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, education, leisure and cultural activities, and special protection measures.

24. Mr. FULCI, noting that Sweden had acceded to the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and Restoration of Custody of Children and the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, said it was commendable that Swedish embassies devoted significant attention to the matter of recovering Swedish children who had been abducted abroad by one of their parents. How widespread was that phenomenon? What approach was taken by the Swedish Government in cases where a child was abducted to a country that was not a party to those Conventions, and where legal international remedies were thus not available?

25. Mrs. MBOI said that, although Sweden boasted an excellent health-care system, both substance abuse and suicide were increasing, especially among adolescents. Furthermore, most of the information regarding substance abuse in the second periodic report was the same as in the initial report. The Committee would like to have data disaggregated by age, gender, social and national origin, and the substance used.

26. Similarly, the information concerning the economic exploitation of children was essentially the same in both the initial and second reports. Had the Government studied that phenomenon more closely since the date of the initial report? Although Swedish legislation was undoubtedly excellent, the Government should provide disaggregated data on the persistence of child labour as well as on any sanctions applied in the case of violations. What, for instance, was the practice among immigrants?

27. The Committee's concluding observations to the initial report of Sweden had noted that Sweden had provided insufficient information concerning the victims of child abuse, including incest. Unfortunately, the second report offered little more than the first. Swedish law in that matter was nonetheless commendable, and in fact provided for extraterritorial prosecutions. As far as the Committee was aware, however, there had been few prosecutions of Swedish citizens who committed such offences abroad. Swedish legislation did not, moreover, cover the matter of computer child pornography or pseudo pornography. What progress had been made in that area, in particular as a result of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children?

28. Mr. RABAH said he would like more information on child labour, and on street children, particularly the foreigners among them. How were they treated by the Government and were steps taken to assist them? Additional information and statistics on the incidence of early pregnancy, abortion and mental health would be useful.

29. According to the summary of the report of the Parliamentary Child Committee on implementation of the Convention in Sweden, the rules for placing young people in institutions should be drafted in accordance with article 37 (c) of the Convention. That meant that every child deprived of his or her freedom should be separated from adults unless it was considered in the child's best interests not to do so. How were children's institutions run; by

whom; what was the number of juvenile offenders; what kinds of offences had they committed; and what was the relationship between the institutions and the juvenile courts?

30. Mrs. KARP said she was concerned about the institution of the Children's Ombudsman. According to the report, there were at least 15 government bodies under various ministries that dealt with children. She would like to see a focal point appointed, with the Ombudsman given an overview of all the relevant institutions or bodies. She wondered whether the focal point should be someone in the Cabinet Office or an independent institution. Had the Government considered having the Ombudsman appointed by Parliament, with a budgetary allocation from Parliament? What was done with the Ombudsman's recommendations? Was he empowered only to recommend, while the Government was charged with implementing his recommendations? How many of those recommendations had in fact been implemented? The Children's Ombudsman apparently did not deal with complaints, whereas the Parliamentary Ombudsman did. Should individual complaints be referred by NGOs, or should it be the Government's responsibility to introduce a structure that would enable children to file their complaints with an external monitoring body? Did such a body exist?

31. Parental counselling had been established for families but, according to the information received by the Committee, only counselling connected to the family situation was provided free of charge, although one third of the people polled in a survey had found other forms of counselling too expensive for them. That seemed to be a strange policy. Apparently people had to reach the point of divorce or separation before they could receive free counselling, whereas a divorce or separation might have been prevented if earlier counselling had been provided without charge.

32. What was being done to make people aware of their rights to support services, particularly in cases where the municipality found that requests for support did not meet the established criteria? The system of legal notification regarding incest and sexual abuse in the family did not seem to be working. Many teachers and doctors did not in fact provide any notification, either because they were unaware of the situation or were not convinced that notification was the right course of action. Statistics on sexual abuse in the family were also low: had any research been undertaken, and what was being done to encourage those aware of abuse to notify the authorities? She also wondered what was being done to enable more child-friendly procedures to be used by the police and in the courts so as to avoid double victimization and asked for more information on the apparently scarce services available for the rehabilitation of child victims of sexual abuse.

33. Ms. BÄCKLUND (Sweden) said, with regard to article 11, that Sweden had ratified the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Concerning Custody of Children and Restoration of Custody of Children and The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction but that they governed relations between the contracting States only. Swedish legislation had been criticized in that regard because of the cases which were not covered by either of those Conventions. Where a child had been wrongfully removed to or retained in Sweden, and a non-contracting State was involved, in accordance with Swedish law the child could not be returned, as foreign

decisions on custody were not recognized in Sweden without a specific legal basis. That principle played an important role when a Swedish court had to decide whether it had any jurisdiction over cases of children wrongfully detained in the State party. The ratification of The Hague Convention of 1996, which had a wider scope and provided greater protection of children than the 1980 instrument, was under consideration by the Ministry of Justice.

34. In cases involving States that had not signed the first Hague Convention, efforts were made to reach bilateral agreements similar in content to that instrument. To facilitate the voluntary return of children, the Government had set aside SKr 1 million for travel expenses. The Government was currently reviewing legislation on international private family law in order to create general applicable rules, the review also covered the rules on foreign decisions concerning custody. Specifically, there were some 40 cases involving children taken from Sweden or brought into Sweden that came under either The Hague or the European Convention and those disputes would probably be resolved, but it was difficult to say how the 15 to 20 cases involving countries that had not ratified either Convention would be resolved.

35. A Parliamentary Committee had been instructed to undertake a complete review of the provisions concerning sexual offences and to consider whether the legislation needed to be made more stringent. The review, which was to be finalized by September 2000, would be based upon the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with regard to sexual offences against children. The Committee was also responsible for exploring whether absolute protection should be extended to children aged 15 to 18 and whether the offence should include voluntary participation by children in acts of sexual exploitation when no payment was made.

36. Legislation on child pornography had also been amended as from 1 January 1999, and would henceforth apply to all kinds of media, including the electronic ones. Virtually any association with child pornography images, including possession, would constitute a criminal offence. The Parliamentary Committee reviewing the law on sexual offences would also consider whether the current dual criminality requirement for jurisdiction on crimes committed abroad against women and children should be waived. Persons maintaining electronic bulletin boards were legally obliged to prevent any further distribution of messages that obviously contained child pornography under a law that had entered into force on 1 May 1998.

37. Since 1 January 1999, juvenile detention care would be used for a youthful offender who had committed an offence before reaching the age of 18 and would have received a prison sentence under the old regulations. The new provisions were time limited, from 14 days to 4 years. A person under 18 who had committed a crime might still occasionally be sent to prison. However, under the new legislation that would apply only if the person concerned had committed a number of offences both before and after reaching the age of 18 or had committed a very serious crime just before reaching that age.

38. There was also an amendment to the Correctional Act, whereby children under the age of 18 could be placed in prison with older inmates only if that were in the best interest of the child. That law was meant to cover the very few cases of children who might have to serve their prison sentences a long way from home and their parents if they did not share space with older

persons; consideration was given on a case-by-case basis. In any event, before the new law had come into effect, only 35 to 40 persons under age 18 had been imprisoned every year, a very small number indeed.

39. Mr. SVENSSON (Sweden) said that, on 2 July 1998, his Government had adopted a National Plan of Action against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. International cooperation in that field already existed within the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Nordic Council and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. In March 1999, a conference was to be held at Stockholm for all the appropriate ministries from the Baltic Sea States to determine how cooperation could be developed. In addition, Sweden was working with Norway and six other Baltic countries to build a data bank of specialists on children at risk, and Sweden was to host the June 1999 Conference of Ministers of Family Affairs of the Council of Europe.

40. Ms. JAHN (Sweden) said that her Government hoped to improve its knowledge of the scope of child labour in Sweden and, in that connection, a project was under way with the Governments of the other Nordic countries and the Nordic Council of Ministers. It was undoubtedly true that many children aged 13 to 17 worked during their vacations and after school, but the extent of the phenomenon was not fully known. Every summer, the trade unions sent emissaries to places where young people worked in order to give them information about their rights, provide assistance and support them in any conflicts with employers. The most common problems were that they were paid below the minimum wage, that the regulations on working hours were not respected and that the working environment was not of the best.

41. The recommendation from the Ombudsman on medical counselling also dealt with cases where parents were suspected of the commission of offences against their children, and her Government was proposing a solution to that problem whereby such children would be entitled to special counsel, which would take over the rights of the parents or guardian. As for the right to appeal decisions regarding care, the social services had absolute and special responsibility regarding protection measures for children but, if they failed to carry out that duty, another authority had to take the responsibility. The issue of the notification by professional persons encountering cases of child abuse involved information and education for such persons rather than correctional issues, if the relevant provisions, which were aimed at protecting children, were to be effective.

42. Mr. SVENSSON (Sweden) said that his Government had formed a one-man committee of inquiry to review the work of the Ombudsman and help him carry it out more efficiently. The committee was also in charge of determining to what extent and in what way the reports and recommendations of the Ombudsman had a practical effect on the work of the Government. The committee's report was due in April or May 1999.

43. Ms. BÄCKLUND (Sweden) said that, in order to ensure that young offenders received adequate treatment while serving their sentences, the new punishment of closed institutional care would be served in homes supervised by the National Board for Institutional Care, set up in 1993, which provided compulsory care under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act and for others under the Alcohol and Drug Abusers (Special Provisions) Act.

44. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask any supplementary questions.

45. Mrs. MOKHUANE said, with reference to article 18 of the Convention, that she was surprised that such a high percentage of children lived with one parent - usually the mother - despite the rising numbers of joint custody awards. She wondered whether any research had been carried out on society's attitude to a child living with his or her father. Under the Maintenance Support Act, the Government was bound to assist in recovering maintenance, even when it exceeded the basic rate, once the amount had been agreed between the parents and the court.

46. Despite the assurances given by the delegation, it was her understanding that budget cuts had indeed affected the quality of health care, especially paediatric care. Since there was some conflict between the Ombudsman's report and that of the Government, she suggested that a study be conducted to assess the impact of budgetary restrictions on the quality of health care. She noted that, owing to the size of classes, some 50 per cent of children were deprived of the remedial education and individual attention they needed. Furthermore, research had shown a drop in the reading level of Swedish children. Was the Government addressing the disparities between municipal authorities and was it prepared to assist those whose necessary public-spending cuts had caused their library stocks to decline?

47. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said she would like to know to what extent children had contributed to the school plan of action to prevent all forms of humiliating treatment and the level of their contact with the National Agency for Education. It was unclear what impact the budget cuts had had on drop-out and repetition rates and the status of teachers. The fact that some local governments could no longer provide certain social services in schools had deprived indigent children of access to them. Could such children be covered by the municipalities under the new provisions?

48. The fact that a parent in detention could decide whether or not his or her whereabouts should be disclosed conflicted with article 9, paragraph 3, of the Convention. Further information was needed concerning the visiting rights of children in institutions or foster homes. What was the situation of the social security payments made to children pending reimbursement by the maintenance debtor? Was the allowance discontinued if repayment was not made? What was the position of children born out of wedlock with regard to social security benefits? Was health care available free of charge under the new provisions to non-Swedish children, who had previously been entitled only to emergency health services?

49. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked whether the situation of minority groups such as the Roma and Saami had improved in the five years since the presentation of Sweden's initial report. While breastfeeding rates in Sweden were very positive, she sought information on the status of the Swedish code of marketing of breast milk substitutes, which had been under consideration since 1995, and of the establishment of a breastfeeding committee as stipulated in UNICEF's Innocenti Declaration. She also regretted the decrease in the numbers of specifically "baby-friendly" hospitals and the fact that they did not meet UNICEF standards.

50. The adolescent suicide rate in Sweden should be monitored. She was also concerned that, between 1992 and 1995, the number of attempted suicides had risen from 541 to 715, 86 per cent of them being girls. In that connection, she wished to know whether any research had been carried out on the prevalence of eating disorders and whether there were any special support measures for girls.

51. She asked when Sweden intended to ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. Lastly, she wished to know how the Swedish authorities intended to disseminate the Committee's discussions and recommendations.

52. Mr. KOLOSOV said he agreed with Mrs. Ouedraogo on the wisdom of adopting a special children's code that explicitly recognized the civil rights and freedoms of all persons under 18. While Sweden had made great strides with its juvenile criminal legislation, he wondered whether the impact of those improvements had been analysed. Were there more or fewer offences? What was the juvenile recidivism rate?

53. It was paradoxical that, while the consumption of alcohol by persons under 20 was prohibited, Sweden provided protection from harmful media for children only up to the age of 15. Juvenile offences, often related to access to such materials, were much more frequent among children aged 16 to 18, who, being children under the terms of the Convention, were also entitled to protection.

54. Mrs. MBOI said that she looked forward to the Parliamentary Committee's report on its review of the sexual abuse laws. Had any consideration been given to providing psychosocial treatment for the abusers as well as the abused? With increasing drug use among the 10 to 18 age group, she was anxious to know the outcome of the anti-drug campaign and whether any systematic disaggregated data were available. She endorsed Mrs. Sardenberg's call for a study of adolescent suicide rates.

55. Mrs. KARP asked what was being done to encourage parents to avail themselves of counselling services, with regard to corporal punishment in particular, in a country which had a vast immigrant population with many cultural differences. What practical assistance for rehabilitation was offered to victims of sexual assault, including incest? On the subject of association, while she understood that children could belong to any number of associations, she wondered whether there were any restrictions on the actual formation of associations by children.

56. Since school health-care services did not include psychological treatment and many children were referred to outside psychologists, she wished to know what coordination mechanism existed between the school health services and the general health system and who was responsible for adolescent psychological treatment. What plans were there to separate children and adults in mental hospitals?

57. It was of the utmost importance that Sweden should ratify the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. Lastly, she called for a comparative review of

differences in treatment and services available to the various categories of children: asylum-seeking, refugee, accompanied or unaccompanied, and children of illegal immigrants.

58. Mr. KOLOSOV drew attention to a contradiction between paragraph 184 of the report, which stated that a minor had normally to obtain the guardian's permission in order to form or enter into an association, and paragraph 317, which declared that every citizen was assured of freedom of association.

59. The CHAIRPERSON said that the report did not make it clear whether Sweden's comprehensive social security system actually covered everyone. She wondered to what extent the relevant laws were enforced in favour of disadvantaged families and would like some clarification of the eligibility criteria for access to the system.

60. Little new information concerning minorities had been volunteered. Were the formal provisions of service and guarantees of protection actually enforced? For example, had there been any evaluation of the reasons for the decrease in home language instruction? Were there were any specific NGOs dealing with minorities? What was the level of inclusion, as opposed to integration, of such children in society, their degree of participation in Swedish social life and the incidence of their involvement in crime?

61. Mr. SVENSSON (Sweden) said that the Ministry of Health and Social Services had established prenatal and post-natal clinics where the staff members were trained to identify and meet the needs of mothers and infants. Networks of parents had been established which operated in conjunction with the schools, and most parents were invited to attend some type of course to assist them in their parenting role. More could be done, however, particularly for the parents of adolescents. Talks had recently been held at the municipal level on how to offer greater support to parents.

62. On the subject of breastfeeding, the rate in Sweden was higher than in any other industrialized country, with 40 per cent of the original 96 per cent of breastfeeding mothers continuing to do so after six months. The apparent reduction in the number of "baby-friendly" hospitals merely reflected the fact that all hospitals were currently baby-friendly.

63. Ms. JAHN (Sweden) said that her Government set the greatest store by good health care, and concentrated on the provision of preventive care and the maintenance of the highest standards in facilities, staff and training. In September 1998, the National Board of Health and Welfare had published some new guidelines and standards covering all areas of the medical services.

64. Her Government was not preparing a special children's code since the existing legislation was not only well-developed but also complied with the provisions of the Convention. Moreover, it would be very difficult to confine all matters relating to children within a single code.

65. Under the Social Services Act, family counselling was available to all who requested it, at a nominal fee which was waived by half of Sweden's municipalities. Children born out of wedlock enjoyed the same social security coverage as other children.

66. Ms. BÄCKLUND (Sweden) said that an examination of the police records over a five-year period of the 3.5 million people in Sweden born between 1945 and 1975 had revealed that 12 per cent of the members of the immigrant population had been suspected of an offence during the period in question. That was considerably above the rate for the population as a whole. While the corresponding rate among young immigrants was also higher than the general average, it was below that of the older generation. That was strikingly different from the situation in other countries, where the level of crime among young immigrants was on the increase.

67. In reply to the question regarding the impact of the new criminal legislation, she said that it was too early as yet to assess its results but that her Government certainly intended to do so at the appropriate time. Judicial procedure provisions had also been reformed in 1995 and their impact was currently being evaluated. Programmes had been introduced by the prison administration for sex offenders and other categories of prisoners which were regularly adapted on the basis of evaluations.

68. With regard to a child's right to maintain contact with both parents in the event of a divorce, the Code of Parenthood and Guardianship had been amended in October 1998 with a view to encouraging joint custody and frequent contact. The courts always based their decisions on the best interests of the child. Both parents were considered to be responsible for ensuring that the child maintained contact with the non-custodial parent.

69. Ms. KORPI (Sweden) said that the overall responsibility for the schools lay with the National Agency for Education, while the National Board of Health and Welfare had specific responsibility for school health services. Her Government had anticipated that the economic cuts during the 1990s might give rise to problems in that area and had therefore established a committee of inquiry into pupil welfare and school health services. While the cuts would no doubt have had some impact on schools, it was not apparent in the academic results.

70. The Children's Ombudsman was monitoring the situation in the schools and legislation provided for special support to pupils who experienced difficulty in attaining minimum standards of achievement. However, schools were on occasion finding it difficult to comply with the legislation and to deal with particular psychosocial and other problems.

71. There was, however, a positive side to the impact of the cuts on schools, reflected in greater flexibility and in the introduction of more progressive methods, which was not always fully appreciated. Certain responsibilities in connection with child care had recently been transferred to the Ministry of Education, thereby enhancing the involvement of schools in children's lives. Pre-school facilities were available for children between the ages of one and five throughout the year, with a view to bringing more care to learning and more learning to care. Teachers were working increasingly closely in order to achieve optimum development.

72. With regard to the costs of schooling, no fees were charged and, when the possibility had been raised a few years previously of charging for school meals, the Ministry had promptly introduced legislation to preclude payment for any services associated with the schools.

73. On the subject of the inclusion/integration dichotomy raised by the Chairperson with regard to the children of minorities, the aim was to enable such children to live comfortably in a bilingual, bicultural context. In some urban areas, however, the problem was not one of inclusion versus integration but of out-and-out segregation and particular attention would have to be given to resolving such problems. In some such areas, pre-school facilities were available for only 35 to 40 per cent of children, in contrast to the national average of 75 per cent. Increased funding had been made available from July 1998 onwards to address the problems in such areas.

74. Ms. SANDQVIST (Sweden) said that unaccompanied refugee children and the children of immigrant families were treated in the same manner as all other children and special attention was provided, where appropriate. The situation of the children of illegal immigrants was quite different, since the Swedish authorities did not tolerate illegal communities and such persons were expelled to their country of origin. Should they fail to comply with the expulsion order and go into hiding they were not entitled to rights under the Convention.

75. Mr. SVENSSON (Sweden) said that Sweden had ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction in late 1998.

76. With respect to the follow-up to the consideration of Sweden's report he pointed out that the delegation had already held a press conference on the subject of its discussions with the Committee; in the near future, NGOs and the Children's Ombudsman would be invited to a meeting to discuss the ideas that had been put forward by the Committee.

77. Having congratulated the members of the Committee on their thorough preparatory work and their extensive knowledge of the situation of children in Sweden and thanked them for their ideas which he would not fail to convey immediately to the Minister for Social Affairs, he undertook to forward to the Committee information on the various subjects raised that had not been available to the delegation.

78. The CHAIRPERSON said that, while the legislation and system existing in Sweden were superb, the Committee suggested that more thorough assessment and follow-up studies were required. Certain problems that existed in Sweden, such as racism and xenophobia, might be approached from the angle of the impact of such attitudes on the rights of the child, which should be kept in the forefront of all endeavours.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.